

# Creativity and Community Action

An Essay and Workbook on  
Expanding the Impact of Artists, Activists,  
and Community Developers

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# Introduction

**IT IS WIDELY OBSERVED THAT CREATIVE PLACEMAKING HAS A MEASUREMENT PROBLEM,**<sup>1</sup> but it is important to identify that the problem stems from fundamental questions about what art and community development can accomplish together. Some methodologically rigorous studies have examined art's role in catalyzing community change, but they may conceptualize art as a cultural amenity that can lead to gentrification, because the impact that is captured is more likely driven by population change than by the redistribution of resources.<sup>2</sup> Others view it as self-evident that art promotes equity, by measuring creative expression as a good in itself, separate from real-world action and change.<sup>3</sup>

**The purpose of this essay is to provide a conceptual and practical framework for artists, activists, and community developers interested in collaborating to achieve more equitable and inclusive community outcomes. While many research studies have asked how art can enhance community development's reach, ambition, and impact,<sup>4</sup> it is also important to ask the opposite question—how can community development and community activism enhance the reach, ambition, and impact of artistic and cultural practices? How can collaborations between artists and activists result in more creative community development, and also in more powerful art?**

Culture-makers who collaborate with activists and community developers can create art that is better poised to illuminate social problems through the eyes of those who seek to change them— art, in other words, that communicates more powerfully a sense of care and agency. These collaborations can spark work that resists harmful narratives about communities, embraces their complexity, and develops a more grounded sense of their possibility. This happens through increasing the *reach* of culture work, the *power* of its reception, and through these means, its *impact* in contributing to cultural change.

In turn, activists and community developers who collaborate with artists can expand their *reach*—expanding the number of residents and organizations with which they are in more authentic relation. Collaborations can expand the *power* of these relationships by deepening commitments of organizations and individuals to each other. And through these means, they can enhance the *impact* of activism and community development.

This essay first imagines the contributions of *community action to art* through two parables—close readings of a poem and a painting that represent public housing transformation in Chicago. It “reads” Ed Roberson’s poetry and Kerry James Marshall’s paintings to understand how their art is more agentic and more powerful because it genuinely engages history and community. The essay then explores a case study of the contributions of *art to community action*, examining the artistic and activist practices of Chicago’s Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA)—how LSNA leaders enhanced their impact by integrating creative and cultural activities with their immigrant defense and economic justice work.

It then ends with a series of simple questions that artists and community developers may ask of each other as they collaborate. These questions are meant to measure the “value-add” (to use a not very artistic term) that artists and community developers offer to each other.

# CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AT LISC

**T**he Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is one of the country's largest organizations supporting efforts to revitalize communities and bring greater economic opportunity to residents. Together with residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America—great places to live, work, visit, do business, and raise families. Over its 40-year history as a community development intermediary, LISC has deployed \$24 billion in community development resources, leveraging \$69 billion in investment. At our core, we are dedicated to a holistic approach to working with communities to improve quality of life, evaluate and address social determinants of health, and ensure economic opportunity for all.

Five years ago, LISC began to think more deeply about how artists and community developers might come together to solve problems and build new pathways for community growth. Although LISC has a long history of investing capital in the development of arts and cultural facilities, we were unfamiliar with the practice of creative placemaking. Our thinking was that partnering artists with community developers might spark a new way of working that would inspire collaboration, improve economic and physical conditions, create social cohesion, and eventually build deeper trust between people and organizations—the very outcomes that are central to achieving our mission. LISC defines creative placemaking as “activities that connect art, culture, and community in order to create resident-driven solutions to neighborhood challenges.”

We anchor our approach to creative placemaking with a set of clearly defined values:

- First, we regard artists as community developers. Artists play a variety of roles that are central to community development. For example, they can serve as building developers, core design-team members, or community design facilitators.
- Second, we employ a racial equity lens when evaluating and administering creative placemaking funds. We work to ensure that our creative placemaking investments promote outcomes in which all people can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.
- Third, we invest in projects that will develop communities without displacing the current residents of those places. We encourage residents to co-create solutions to problems and actively participate in their implementation. Our creative placemaking investments are community driven and comprehensive, and they emphasize the importance of collaborative change.
- Finally, our creative placemaking investments cultivate inherent community assets, build capacity, and cultivate agency. Indeed, our hope is to support work that has been rooted in community for decades but will benefit from investment and technical assistance.

LISC has dramatically expanded its arts and cultural work over time and has contributed significant funds and other resources to communities around the country. We have established a national creative placemaking infrastructure, supported hundreds of projects, and deepened the professional skills and capacities of our staff and our partners. In addition, since 2015, LISC—in partnership with PolicyLink—has leveraged support from the National Endowment for the Arts and The Kresge Foundation to provide grants and technical assistance to creative placemaking projects across the country.

Perhaps most important, we have worked to ensure that our creative placemaking efforts are integrated with the rest of the work we do at LISC, because we are seeing that the model works in helping us achieve our central goals for community revitalization. We understand that when arts and cultural partners are at the table, we are able to be more responsive to communities, build more effective coalitions, and, as a result, address critical needs in an even more comprehensive way. Our arts-related investments have transformed our practice and that of our community partners.

This essay is one way of thinking about these process transformations.

# Against Sacrifice

**CHICAGO IS KNOWN AS THE “FIRST AMERICAN CITY” FOR THE TIMING OF ITS EXPLOSIVE DEVELOPMENT.** In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it was the fastest-growing urban area known to modern history, at a time when America’s imperial ambitions on the international stage were accelerating. But calling Chicago the First American City obscures the complexity of its settlement and development. While there are different views about the origin of the name “Chicago,” it may refer to the word for wild garlic in the Miami-Illinois language, as the plant was said to have grown abundantly in the area—a fact that raises obvious questions about the city’s “firstness” and whose community preceded it.<sup>5</sup> Though his role was ignored by white Americans for centuries, the area’s first permanent non-Indigenous resident was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, a Black man whose legacy was lifted up through the activism of Black Chicagoans in the 1930s, as they built the city in the wake of the Great Migration.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Chicago is a place that, like other places, is marked by historical layering, complex patterns of development, and also attempts to erase peoples and their histories.

Telling the story of any place involves choices, not just about whose stories to tell, but also about the ways these different stories interact with each other. Powerful art has always developed nuanced and intentional ways of representing these different voices and perspectives, which is one of the reasons that activists and community developers have increasingly sought to collaborate with artists. These collaborations can advance local narratives to represent places with justice, both in the sense of honoring the place with an accurate representation, and in the sense of ensuring that excluded voices are heard.

But beyond this important narrative function, what value can art bring to the real-world work of community activism and development? And how can artists and culture workers themselves benefit from these encounters, creating work that is more impactful and advances racial and economic justice more substantially?

As a way into these questions, I want to pose an allegory about the things that genuine engagement with community, history, and activism provides art, by examining public housing redevelopment in Chicago through the eyes of one of Chicago's most powerful poets (in a long line of powerful Chicagoan poets)—Ed Roberson—and through the work of one of the city's most powerful painters, Kerry James Marshall.

This story starts decades ago, in an act of federal policy implemented by many cities across the country. In 1992, supported by a recommendation of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, Congress created the HOPE VI program. HOPE VI provided modernization resources to rehabilitate public housing developments that had been starved of capital repair funds and improvements since their construction.

The program's initial stated intent was both rehabilitation and resident empowerment, to be achieved by having tenant advisory boards direct the renovation of their own buildings.<sup>7</sup> But early in program implementation, local administrators and elected officials saw opportunities to transform entire communities by using HOPE VI resources to tear down housing where the most economically excluded lived, and encouraging other forms of local development to rise in its place. Many administrators fought the longstanding requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that units lost over construction and redesign be replaced on a one-to-one basis, a rule meant to ensure that rehabilitation didn't reduce housing available to those who needed it most. Instead, mayors and housing authority administrators argued that it was necessary to cut back the scale of large properties to create pedestrian-friendly communities, marked not by the modernist model of "towers in the park" but by the principles of the New

Urbanism. Administrators also fought against any requirement that residents who lived in torn-down projects be allowed to return to the properties after redevelopment, arguing that it left the new developments vulnerable to the gangs whose members once lived there.

The end of one-to-one replacement and the ability to select new tenants gave housing authorities the power to use HOPE VI funds to replace traditional public housing with mixed-income developments, screening out tenants they felt were undesirable and attracting new, higher-income residents. They did so in part under the theory that people who earned very little needed to be exposed to different people of different economic classes and races, and that public policy should fight against the concentration of poverty.<sup>8</sup> (The developments that sprung up around the country were celebrated for their transformative potential; LISC participated in many of them, and it is not the purpose of this essay to argue against the goal of racial and economic integration.)

It was acknowledged, in part through the organizing and protest of groups in Chicago and across the country, that fewer people would be sheltered. But the argument was that both the residents who were displaced and the neighborhoods where they lived would experience a fresh start. That is, the view was that some public housing developments had negatively impacted their residents and surrounding neighborhoods to the point that nothing short of their clearance and rebuilding was necessary, so as to start anew.<sup>9</sup>

In the decade following its enactment, about 450 HOPE VI grants were awarded to 170 cities. On Chicago's South Side, a two-mile strip of public housing known as the State Street Corridor was almost completely torn down from the '90s through the 2000s, using HOPE VI funds in what was called the Plan for Transformation. The Robert Taylor Homes were a series of high-rise buildings containing 4,300 units. Stateway Gardens had 1,644 units in eight buildings. Hilliard Towers had 710. They were almost entirely inhabited by Black families, and the clearance of the projects was partly justified by a racialized casting of crime, which made tearing them down an easier political target.<sup>10</sup>



ABOVE: Robert Taylor Homes, c.1963. Credit: Patricia Evans



ABOVE: Demolition on State Street, 2000s. Credit: Patricia Evans

About the time that the towers came down, the poet Ed Roberson moved from the East Coast to Chicago. "The Open," from his *City Eclogue*, begins:

**Their buildings razed.                      They ghosts  
their color that haze of plaster dust**

**their blocks of bulldozed air opened to light  
take your breath as much**

**by this kind of blinding choke as by the loss felt  
in the openness**

**suddenly able to see  
as if across a drained lake from below...**

**People lived where it weren't open,  
a people whose any beginning is disbursed  
by a vagrant progress,**

**whose any settlement  
is overturned for the better**

**of a highway through to someone else's  
possibility.**

Please take a moment for poetry. Roberson's language is difficult, but not more difficult than the work of community development and community activism.

Roberson's poem is a deep recounting of the costs of redevelopment to Black Americans. The poem starts by describing residents who once lived in a neighborhood as "ghosts," embodied in the dust of their homes' demolition—a presence felt deeply in an absence. In America, there are so many of these "ghosts": urban renewal, the subject of Roberson's poem, was nicknamed "Negro Removal," and was advanced by federal and local politicians and public officials, from Robert Moses in New York to Sam Yorty in Los Angeles, with about one million households estimated to have been directly displaced by the urban renewal and urban freeway programs. As Roberson describes the *physical* openness derived from clearing Black homes, he also writes about the *metaphorical* openness that becomes available to whites only through these demolitions: "any settlement / is overturned for the better of a highway through someone else's possibility."

The "open," in other words, is both the empty space left in the immediate wake of tearing down homes, and opportunity and freedom bestowed to white Americans as it is stripped from Black Americans.

In order to see this shifting of burdens, Roberson suggests, you have to take a different viewpoint. The people who are able to notice the pain of displacement experience **"loss felt / in the openness / suddenly able to see / as if across a drained lake from below..."** That is, you understand these shifted costs not by looking at spaces from above, from Olympian heights, but from the bottom, up: from the basin of a "drained lake," gazing up at the sky from the earth, holding a mirror to this naïve view of progress (even if the mirror must itself be imagined, because the lake surface—the mirror surface—is gone).

Roberson has said that his poem is about urban renewal broadly, and the work is not, specifically, a reference to the Plan for Transformation in Chicago. So I do not mean that we should read Roberson's work in one-to-one correspondence to the HOPE VI program, as a literal policy critique. **Why, then, talk about this redevelopment strategy and this poem together? What, in other words, is the value of art in illuminating the world of housing and community development? Conversely, what does Roberson's genuine**

**encounter with razing and demolition provide his art, and what does his art give us that could not be illuminated by reading a policy brief, or through activism to fight the negative effects of redevelopment?**

Community development emerged in part as a reaction to urban renewal. As a movement, it has always had some roots in the cultural expressions of the communities it represented. In recent years, collaboration between arts and community development sectors has been promoted through strategies known as creative placemaking, or placekeeping, and supported by major foundations, federal agencies, and LISC. But at this moment of increased movement power, as well as the sunset of ArtPlace (one of the major funders of this work), it is worth taking a step back to ask what the arts provides community development, that cannot be advanced without it. This is not a new question, but it feels like a moment to advance some better answers by learning from the experiences of artists and activists.

From at least the time of Plato, philosophers have posed questions about how the arts can advance justice. (And up through modern times, artist-activists such as Audre Lorde, José Clemente Orozco, and Paul Robeson, to name a few, have developed answers.) At the philosophical level, this interaction between the arts and community action is often imagined in very broad and abstract terms. Community development, by contrast, operates at a more immediate level—a level of daily experience and practice. Community development translates broader policy and programmatic institutional racism or anti-racism into actions that shape outcomes for people. That's one reason that artists should be looking at our field and movement for inspiration.

One broad formulation about the relationship between art and social change is to say that art awakens the spirit—it enlivens reality, awakens solidarity, and gives us a sense of the possible, as it documents humanity against forces of dehumanizing brutality.<sup>11</sup>

**This formulation, while broadly true, is also broadly unhelpful if our task is to illuminate the particular type or quality of art that may be aligned with and work hand in hand with a pursuit of justice.** Because it is also true that

spiritual and intellectual arousal can equally be used for anti-democratic purposes and even to ready a population for racist violence. Phenomena such as the church's historical support of the Crusades and the current mobilization of the internet for hate show us that it is not "awakening" alone that necessarily points people toward justice. In literary spheres, some of the most significant poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, sought to enliven moral and spiritual fervor on behalf of monarchy and fascism. These and many other examples show us how that spirit can be heightened not for justice but to steel oneself to commit atrocities.

Instead, for those who have always cared about creating cultures that are oriented toward justice, we must interrogate the *qualities* of connections between art and community development, to understand the specific nature of the experiences they illuminate.

The language of Roberson's poem itself gives us a way to understand the *specific* qualities of this relationship between action and spirit that might be better aligned toward justice. Let's look at the poem's final lines, which describe the demolition of a building.



**Here I want to play with the word HOPE for a moment. If hope (the sentiment, not the federal housing program) is defined as a condition of the spirit alone, and not one that has some correspondence in policy, progress, and justice in the real world, it may falsely bring us to think that new life comes from wiping away the past. And this is what Roberson describes—the false sense of hope and new life as the past is wiped away for an open future. In “blocks of bulldozed air opened to light,” this openness comes to some, at the expense of others. For those who lived in the bulldozed blocks, clearance is “a highway through to someone else’s possibility,” while they receive only the choke of dust and history.**

The whole column  
from top to bottom open as if  
it were the strangled neck  
of the hourglass that was going up  
and not its falling sands:  
as if all our chance. seconded. grace  
God's strange rope spinning things open out of sky,  
up in smoke  
our tornado our lynched  
black pillar of light.

This devastating passage, bringing to mind repeated traumas in Black history, also interrogates the nature of spiritual power and its relationship to the worldly power that lays towers low. As he describes the act of demolition, Roberson uses imagery drawn from religion: the “column” evokes the pillar of cloud and fire that guided the Israelites out of slavery, a metaphor he emphasizes in talking about “God’s strange rope.” The passage also interrogates and questions the ways that we may think about transmitting or communicating this trauma in beauty and art.

There is, from a certain distance, an awesome force in demolition, and Roberson identifies awe as a feeling that art has long traced to the experience

of the sublime and to religion, to “God’s strange rope spinning things open out of sky.” Urban renewal, and the toppling of public housing in Chicago, has an undeniable, devastating power. I traveled to the South Side once with a colleague who grew up there, and who hadn’t been back for years. “They’re gone. They’re just gone,” my colleague said, in a tone of awe. Where there were towers was now open sky. Visiting State Street as a child he said he felt terror when other teens asked the question “where are you from?”—because the answer meant he would be treated either as an enemy or as defenseless because he was unaffiliated with a project or gang. The tone in his voice echoed the dread the blocks once held, and a fear at the power that cleared them to the sky.

But Roberson is not just showing us the awesome force of raw power—the toppling of buildings. In the images he chooses, he shows that this rope between ground and sky, suggested in the dust that shoots up in demolition—the effective connection between the earthly and spiritual worlds—has two important characteristics.

First, this “rope” creates a sense not of open and blank time but of historical time, marked by human lives and human bodies. In the “tornado” (recalling the image of God’s voice in the whirlwind) there is a wind, a spirit, a material presence, suggested by the image of “a lynched black pillar of light.” The wind’s motion, evoking demolition dust going up like an hourglass in reverse, does not provide a blank “clearance,” a false sense of the “open,” but instead moves us *deeper* into history, by bringing to mind the Black bodies whose murders helped spark the Great Migration to Chicago and other cities. In Roberson’s poem, time is embodied or re-embodied, and does not gaze into a blank or naively open past or future.

Second, the image that connects heaven and earth, for all its religious connotations, is very earthly, agentic, and demystifying.

It’s important to note that religion, where poetry started, also has identified mechanisms for the transmission of spiritual aspirations into efficacious ones. This mechanism is called sacrifice, and Roberson evokes an image of sacrifice in this column, by suggesting in the image of “God’s strange rope” a connection between the divine and the mortal realm, in smoke going up to heaven.

In this flawed, strange archetype of **sacrifice**, Roberson appears to say, pain or loss is exchanged into blessing. But it is a blessing only for some.

Sacrificial thinking, one might argue, is the view that those who lived in the projects may have suffered displacement, but at least the neighborhood as a whole has improved by certain measures. Some suffered, but the suffering was necessary. Roberson reminds us that this perspective is enabled by racism and the distance of a professional gazing onto what appears to be a

**This rejection of sacrifice also holds a lesson for the field of community development. For there is also a tendency, in any kind of community practice, to embody sacrificial ideas—sacrificial because practitioners assume failure must be endured by someone, for some greater good. There is even a tendency within creative placemaking to say that art itself is somehow responsible for gentrification, because by making things “nicer” it increases the value of local property. It’s not helpful, however, to treat art as the thing that automatically causes tradeoffs between beauty and social progress—that’s an unnecessarily sacrificial view of the power of the arts. Instead, we should look to explore what kinds of arts, what forms of expression, are better aligned with outcomes for justice. This is in many ways the argument of this essay: look to the work itself, whether artistic or in community development practice, and see how it embodies, enlivens, and enhances the experience of action and progress.**

mysterious or intractable problem, that is here resolved through a violent solution—when the real failure is an inability to imagine a different or better way or to participate in work to create it. Failure is a kind of obscurity where we cannot see any other way.

Roberson goes further, suggesting that this sacrificial thinking is horrific by situating it as a lynching. This image is particularly important not just because it brings history back into a field that has been robbed of Black presence. The strangled neck of the hourglass shows us that the destruction is in fact performed by human hands, which shape time and its measure. It's not abstract forces, or public policy, or social forces, but rather *people* who commit murder.

**In the same way, even as it promotes a sense of emotional relief or catharsis, art must not absolve practitioners of the responsibilities that come from this attention to individual life and individual fate.**

Roberson's poem concludes with the image not of obscurity but of the clarity of lives within the rubble, in the resistance of a squatter. In "a flattened sea of housing brick" a commuter sees

someone

standing in the last building standing,  
in a bare window, barely in his shorts....he,  
a lone survivor, a squatter keeping it open  
drifts out into the open .

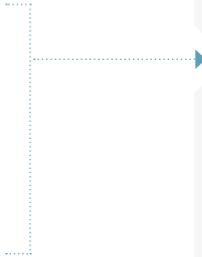
This kind of an "open," which the squatter develops himself, is a realm of more genuine possibility, because it comes from the clarity of resistance. Smoke obscures, but the more lasting image is the person who remains.

Roberson's focus on clarity is important. The composure and apparent clarity of public policy as it is often enacted can mask the inhumanity of its processes. But Roberson also signals that the discomposure, the unsettling caused by poetry—the disorientation of its difficult language — like the awesome leveling of towers and smoke, does not necessarily resolve all questions in the favor of humanity and agency.

**Art can disorient and reorient, but there must be no mysterious thinking in either artistic or activist realms.**

Poetry and art can use language or imagery that is difficult or challenging, but this is not the same thing as embracing a mysterious path between our experiences and the broader world. We must not relinquish our ability to draw with clarity others' lives and our connection to them, even if it is tremendously difficult to do so when so many forces internal and external attempt to erase them. This greater attentiveness—this more powerful art—can come from observing individual, lived experiences that are illuminated through acts of resistance.

We also must not relinquish our ability to make clear recommendations and take clear action. The world is knowable, and when towers fall it is not a moment of sublimity, of inexpressible awe. Roberson's final image is not an expression of the awe or mystery or implied sacrifice of towers falling. People remain. Our perspective must be with the clear-eyed gaze of the person resisting and looking out, in order to be truly open, expanding the field.



**This is one of the values that community action holds for art—it teaches the artist not just to describe a social problem but to illuminate the problem through the lens of activism and resistance.**

# WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT THE ROLE OF ART IN A TIME OF CRISIS?

- 1 Choices about urban development are often described from a great distance and in ways that make them not choices but “inevitable.”
- 2 Art can amplify the chosen-ness of a particular policy decision by showing its impact on individual experience, by revealing its human costs and burdens. But art can also evoke a sense of passive awe, depicting terror and trauma without giving a sense of how individuals can come together to heal and resist. This is a risk of making art at this moment of crisis—it can channel a sense of powerlessness.
- 3 Therefore, arts and cultural practitioners need to learn from those who spend their lives preserving community for the good, or changing it for the better. And just as powerful art can represent images of agency and autonomy, so can collaboration between the artists and activists advance the *reach*, the *power*, and the *impact* of community organizing and development.



RIGHT: Marshall, K.  
(1994). *Many Mansions*  
[Acrylic on paper  
mounted on canvas].  
Art Institute of Chicago,  
Chicago, IL/USA.  
ArtIC (n.d.). Retrieved  
from: [//www.artic.edu/  
artworks/137125/  
many-mansions](http://www.artic.edu/artworks/137125/many-mansions).

**HERE IS ANOTHER IMAGE OF STATEWAY GARDENS, IN THE WORK OF KERRY JAMES MARSHALL.** Marshall, a Chicagoan, is particularly concerned with the white supremacist construction of the art world's canon and how it elevates white European masters over racialized others, even as many white artists have historically appropriated Black cultural forms or denigrated Blackness.

The 1994 painting is called *Many Mansions*, and is part of his Garden Project, a series of large-scale canvases depicting public housing in Chicago and Los Angeles. Against the stigmatizing view of public housing as “lost” places or sites of suffering alone, Marshall presents them as places of joy, rest, and work. At the same time, the developments are not just Edens, despite the connotation of the title “Garden Project,” which refers both to the fact that many place names contain the word “garden” and to the mythical paradise. They are complex places.

In the painting, Stateway Gardens' many towers are in the background. In the foreground are young men, gardening and beautifying the place with roses and with Easter baskets. Bluebirds bring ribbon to their work and a sense of almost Disney-cartoonish celebration. But in the young men's work, tending to the ground, in the formality of their dress, and in the seriousness of their gaze, there is a sense that they may be preparing graves—perhaps for those who died young from gun violence or illness, before their brothers and sisters and mothers were displaced by the towers coming down. (The red and white roses are decorative, but also smeared, like blood is smeared.) If the men are not funeral workers they may be churchgoers—the ambiguity is perhaps intentional, and in some ways it doesn't matter, because church is where life and death are both tended. Their serenity may even raise the question of whether they themselves are also the departed. But regardless of their status as living or as ghosts, they remain concerned with care and harvest.

On the ribbon across the top of the frame are the words, partly obscured, “In My Mother's House There Are Many Mansions.” The title is an allusion to John 14:1, where Jesus comforts his followers before the Crucifixion, saying “In My Father's house there are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for

you.” “Many Mansions” refers literally to the 1,644 units, densely piled one on the other. But by substituting Mother for Father, Marshall suggests that it is the mothers who remain in this world after their sons and daughters depart for another, especially in places like Stateway Gardens. They bear the consequences of loss and will soon bear the consequences of displacement.

As a cultural practitioner, Marshall's emphasis is on craft and technique—“Mastry” was the name of his retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. He works consciously in the tradition of European Renaissance painters but also cites the influence of Minnie Evans, Simon Sparrow, Twins Seven Seven, and Jacob Lawrence. Marshall's emphasis on craft is, in his view, a way of investigating the world. “Whether abstract or figurative,” he has said, “technique is an opportunity to explore the ways things get done, the way the world works.” Marshall has made analogies between painterly composition and science, even particle physics. He has observed that “breaking down things to their smallest units, and understanding different kinds of materials and what they're good for,” can result in a fusion that creates tremendous energies—even “100,000<sup>th</sup> of a gram,” he once reflected, is worth investigating because “it's hard to know what kind of uses it could be put to.”

**Another reason that Marshall investigates tradition and craft, and is especially attuned to the transformation of tradition, is that he wants to show that tradition is in itself a choice; style is a choice, in the same way that policies are chosen and are not a “given.”** And in *Many Mansions*, it is not simply one choice that's represented—it's a layering of choices and possibilities, expressed as a layering of modes of expression in this multivocal composition.

The painting blends naturalistic with abstract and conceptual techniques in a kind of collage. Written in large letters is “IL 2-22,” the registration number of the development. All seasons are represented there at once; there is a tree in autumn along with roses, which often depart by July. While there are realistic images of towers, etched in the foreground are pure applications of paint—pure style. **Just as Marshall's account of Stateway Gardens is complex, taking in joy and sadness, so does his technique suggest a layering of histories and perspectives.**

In the context of this essay, I also want to lift up Marshall's emphasis on the value of craft, against the value of expression alone. The two are not mutually exclusive, as expression is certainly advanced by craft, and craft may be sharpened by the artist's experiences. But, somewhat provocatively, Marshall has spoken out against overvaluing expression as the reason for producing art. He once observed, "The greatest fraud is self-expression. What it has always been about is establishing a place for yourself in relationship to everyone before you."

For creative placemaking, this sentiment is important, because the field has often described the importance of the arts in terms of expression and storytelling, without guidance about what *forms* of expression are most valuable. In Marshall's emphasis on craft, we see that he prioritizes technique as an encounter with history and an investigation of the social world. Work, and the relationship to the work of generations before you, is the focus, even if that work is reimagined and transformed.

To extend the painting's allusion to John 14, the "Spirit of truth" referred to in the biblical chapter, the comforter, will be coming, but paving the way for this spirit means attending to those who reside and resided in these many mansions, in all their living complexity and differences—1,644 units filled with life. While each soul cannot be represented in a single canvas, in Marshall's painting the force of these lives is communicated in an artistic transformation—a canvas of complex, living parts that represent aspiration and loss tied together, a community between them, building redemption when painful realities and visions of better possibilities are all held on an equal plain.

To draw a parallel with the argument above:

**Policy that does not take into account individual experience can certainly be used for the ends of clearance, wiping away towers without care for those who live there. But, though they do far less harm, artists who focus on the goal of personal expression alone, and do not attempt to deeply understand "the way the world works" so as to intervene within it, can also inadvertently wipe clean the slate of both history and grounded possibility, through their art.**

# WHAT DOES THIS SHOW US ABOUT THE POWER THAT HISTORY AND ACTIVISM CAN BRING TO *ART* AT THIS MOMENT?

- 1 Some of the most powerfully expressive art is created by attending to community in its complexity, its possibility, and its everyday realities.
- 2 Artistic craft is a way of investigating the world—reimagining spaces in the light and power of genuine care.
- 3 Even though Marshall doesn't actively collaborate with activists and community developers, his art engages with places in a way that emphasizes their autonomy and their complexity.

# Here to Stay

**PRACTICE IS THE APPROPRIATE PLACE TO MEASURE** the impact of art on community development and activism, and also to observe the impact of community development and activism on artistic and cultural activities.

By advocating that we focus on practice and not community-wide outcomes, I mean that it is inappropriate to expect that arts-enhanced community development and organizing activities will, in themselves, change or transform entire neighborhoods, without regard to the level of resources afforded to them.

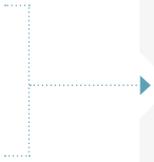
That is, it is unfair to look for changes in median household income or housing values as the result of a few years of creative placemaking or creative place-keeping, when centuries of ongoing racial inequity so deeply shape these outcomes. To create an expectation of area-wide impact without adequately resourcing the intervention is an unfair test at best. But it is also inappropriate to look at community change indicators, because these measurement expectations can claim success for what is really a broader, system-wide failure. That is, area-wide changes in income or housing values, in a few short years, are much more likely to be driven by changes in the composition of the population—in other words, gentrification and displacement—than by changes *within* the population.<sup>12</sup> They are more likely to be the result of towers falling than of genuine community growth or resilience.

Practice is also the appropriate focus to examine the impact of art on community development and activism, because art can enliven people to their daily experience, and at its best, to the experience of agency and action. So it is at the level of *practice* that we can best understand the intersection of the two domains of work, to develop a productive conception of the relationship between them.

The recent experiences of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) serve as a case study for this successful integration. Logan Square West and Hermosa (Spanish for “beautiful”) are indeed beautiful neighborhoods in the Northwest Side of Chicago, which have been the site of both home and struggle for immigrant families. In Logan Square, over a quarter of the population was born outside the U.S. More than a third of Hermosa residents were born outside the U.S., with over 70% identifying as Latinx. By many measures, Logan Square was already the fastest-gentrifying areas of the city—access to the rapid-transit Blue Line and the nearby creation, recently, of “The 606” bike path supercharged the displacement of families and culturally rooted businesses. Logan Square’s housing prices more than doubled in recent years, while the income of its typical resident barely increased, and the neighborhood has often experienced the most demolitions of existing housing of any area in Chicago.<sup>13</sup>

For almost 60 years, LSNA has acted to advance social justice through organizing with individual leaders and with local organizations to help determine the neighborhood’s future. Its annual assembly, comprised of over 40 member groups, includes churches, service organizations, and other civic associations, and since 1994 this assembly has developed a holistic plan to promote a vision of community improvement without displacement. LSNA currently serves more than 6,500 residents across the Logan Square, Hermosa, and Avondale neighborhoods, and impacts many more through nationally recognized issue campaigns and programs.

For example, in recent years, LSNA has helped develop innovative organizing and service tools, such as the Parent Mentor Program, which engages predominantly immigrant parents in classrooms as teachers’ aides and involves them in leadership development and organizing activities. With its parent and student leaders, the program has fought against Chicago school closures, and has been a particularly powerful force around gentrification, pushing not only for home repair funds and affordable housing development within the neighborhood, but also for policy changes to promote more equitable development of land within Chicago as a whole. While always focused on immigrants’ rights and organizing, in recent years LSNA was recognized by the Department of Justice to provide accredited representatives for individuals in immigration proceedings.



**A practical, grounded perspective is key to the successful integration of the two practices, and a basis for understanding and measuring how interactions between artists and community developers can result in better action for both disciplines.**

The title of one of LSNA's most recent holistic plans (which was supported by LISC) is *Here to Stay*. The plan's strategies include organizing for policy change and advancing programmatic strategies around housing, immigration, economic development, health and wellness, and education. As suggested by the phrase "Here to Stay," the framework responds to both gentrification and displacement, and to the increased targeting of immigrants by the federal government. **As Marcelo Ferrer, director of immigration services at LSNA, articulated, "Immigration [and Customs Enforcement] and gentrification are a 'two-headed dragon' and a form of attack on our families."**

While the plan is multifaceted, one particular point of its focus is the advancement of a "Welcoming Corridor" along Armitage Avenue, the street that connects Hermosa and Logan Square West. The corridor has become a place for integrating the various dimensions of LSNA's work, a site for acquiring and developing permanently affordable homes through the *Here to Stay* community land trust, supporting small businesses along Armitage, and defending immigrants.

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## The Tamal Fest of 2019

The Welcoming Corridor is also one of the places where artistic and cultural activities, over time, organically became integrated with LSNA's organizing. In 2018, LSNA youth leaders were having conversations with community members to learn their views on gentrification and displacement, and extended these talks to include local business owners, to understand how they started to work in the neighborhood and how they saw their future in Hermosa. The youth leaders discovered that many owners were struggling to keep their clientele, because Latinx families were moving out and larger establishments like Dollar Trees were competing for those customers.

Out of these encounters, LSNA saw opportunities for expanded partnerships with business owners, which culminated in the idea of the Hermosa Tamal Fest, held in August 2019. The Tamal Fest was a celebration of Latin American culture and the many culturally rooted businesses near Armitage Avenue. Conducted in collaboration with Mosaico Arte Chicago and Mujeres Artesanas, the event showcased tamal vendors from different parts of Latin America, locally made artisanal goods, and performances by local artists.

Despite planning for a small block party, the event went viral on social media and several thousand people attended over the course of the day. Though the vendors ran out of tamales, attendees patronized nearby restaurants and other local establishments. And while event planners had been concerned about how some business owners might feel about their disrupting car traffic by closing down the block, Melissa Texcahua, an organizer with LSNA, said that they were overwhelmed by the support they received from local entrepreneurs. "It felt like a family party, a family gathering," she said.

This moment of celebration also emerged as an act of resistance. That weekend, the Trump Administration had announced impending immigration raids on "sanctuary cities." The decision to move forward with Tamal Fest was intentional, as its organizers recognized the need for celebration, community, and culture in the face of these attacks. For this reason, the event had even more emotional power for its attendees, and paralleled the approach LSNA tries to bring to all its immigration defense and organizing work, according to Marcelo Ferrer:

**“ We always look at our immigration work as decreasing people's sense of isolation, defending our most vulnerable in the community, and bringing awareness to their stories. When you're doing an action to defend a family that's potentially being deported, you're bringing awareness and defending them. With each rally you're bringing awareness because it sends a message to others that you're not alone—that LSNA and your neighbors are going to rally around you.**



**ABOVE:** Performers of Aztec dances at Tamal Fest. Tamal Fest included tamales prepared in traditional styles representing different Latin American regions.  
**LEFT:** People enjoy tamales in the Mexican style.

**But Tamal Fest was not just an elevation of the spirit at a time of need, through affirmation and celebration—it helped to concretely further the power of LSNA’s advocacy efforts with city and state elected officials, and expanded LSNA’s reach with community members around immigration defense.**

LSNA had been advocating with legislators for some time to create safe spaces for immigrants, through policies that keep U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) out of hospitals and courthouses and further limit interaction between local law enforcement and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). But LSNA sometimes heard pushback from elected officials, who said that community groups themselves should be creating these safe spaces. Tamal Fest allowed LSNA to say it was doing its part; as Ferrer said, “We’ve activated spaces. We’ve tested it. We’ve done it.”

**As per the framework above, Tamal Fest amplified the power of community organizing.**

Tamal Fest also helped consolidate and expand Hermosa and Logan Square West residents' connection to LSNA's immigrant defense work. In 2020, a father had been picked up by ICE, just east of the Welcoming Corridor. Because even isolated ICE actions can bring fear to an entire community, LSNA used its social media presence—which had expanded dramatically through the Tamal Fest—to conduct a know-your-rights workshop. The training had nearly 3,000 views, many more than LSNA's previous trainings.

LSNA conducted an action with the local alderman, together with community members and immigrant justice groups, in front of the school where the father was detained, and blanketed the neighborhood with information about the unmarked van that was at the time taking people from the streets. Because of Tamal Fest, LSNA was also better able to publicize in restaurants that before might not have been willing to advertise their affiliation with pro-immigrant actions. Even though the threat of ICE remained in 2020, LSNA continued to advocate and protect families through socially distant rallies, through flyers, and by talking to businesses and making sure they also had “know your rights” information available. In this context, Tamal Fest helped steady the business owners' courage and determination, and as a result helpful information reached more people.

This information was not just a warning about ICE and a reminder of individual rights. It was also a reminder of how the community had stood up for itself. Norma Rios-Sierra, LSNA's board chair and a visual artist herself, described how it was critical to let people know about the organizing their neighbors had accomplished, because there is a natural tendency for people to be mistrustful and isolated.

“ The root of our work is relationship-building...a lot of the public doesn't have any trust. They don't have any trust in developers, the government, or legislators. And sometimes they don't trust the community organizations, because they don't see them working for them. As a visual artist, it was important for us to put something visual there. Even if you're not going to meetings and you're not seeing all this background work, LSNA does know what you're going through. And even though it feels like it's hopeless, we are fighting for you. And until this event, people didn't know how much we did to hold back ICE raids, how much we advocated for our schools to be safe spaces.

Tamal Fest amplified the *reach* of community development and activism.

Tamal Fest amplified representations of courage, and also fostered courage. It helped community residents understand the history of Hermosa, through a lens of agency and activism.

## The Carnival de Cariño of 2020

The year 2020 was one of intense pain for many Logan Square West and Hermosa residents and business owners. One of the hardest-hit neighborhoods in Chicago in Covid-19 illnesses and deaths, it was also one of the most economically impacted, with many residents out of work and many businesses shuttered. It was a place where many businesses were shut out of state and federal economic relief funds such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP); according to LSNA's estimates, only about one in ten businesses in the Welcome Corridor received a PPP loan. And in Hermosa (as across the country), undocumented workers have been excluded from state and federal pandemic aid, no matter how much in taxes individuals have paid over time.

To address this widespread community hardship and exclusion from relief, LSNA built on its relationships with local businesses to develop a kind of mutual aid model, where individuals could identify others in need, to receive restaurant food. The restaurants were compensated by LSNA, with funding provided through LISC by the Mars Wrigley Foundation's Shared Smiles Placemaking Program, among other sources. This strategy supported local businesses and households in crisis at the same time, and it allowed Bonitas, El Azteca, and GooGoo's Table, all locally owned businesses, to provide 700 meals to families from September to December of 2020.

The pandemic meant that LSNA could not recreate Tamal Fest in 2020, but it could continue to sup-



port the Welcoming Corridor through collaborations among local businesses and artists. One way LSNA did this, also with support of the Chicago Smiles grant, was by paying artists to paint menu boards that were placed outside local establishments. LSNA artists also created a book celebrating different Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, which came with a clay art kit so that families could develop their own crafts in their homes.

The highlight of LSNA's placekeeping activities in 2020 was the creation of a Día de Muertos altar, in front of which a Tamborazo band performed. The altar brought together traditional components of the *ofrenda* (a home altar, literally “offering”)—including marigolds, *papel picado* (cut-out papers meant to blow in the wind), glasses of water, and scattered petals—with images of pain and activism from this past year, including a photograph of George Floyd and signs reading “Trans Lives Matter” and “Black Lives Matter.” At its center was a sign with the words “*Hermosa Vida*”—meaning “beautiful life,” but also Hermosa the place, the life of the neighborhood.

Norma Rios-Sierra talked about the ways the altar helped produce public and collective mourning, for the purpose of affirming life and health:

“What I love about Día de Muertos is that it's a beautiful way to celebrate our loved ones who have passed away. In Latin America, you can't have the good without the bad. You can't have life without death. It's healthy. And to celebrate a loved one who has gone in that way, it's colorful, it's musical. The loss is still very sad—it's depressing. But it's also healthy to mourn, and building a community altar allows us to do it collectively and publicly. And a lot of this interconnectedness between immigration, housing, and public safety is about mental health and wellbeing. It's about building trust and easing people's minds. It says it's ok to be sad, because we've all been through a lot. But also to let them know that yes, we're going to throw a big party in the good times but we're also going to be there in the bad times—we'll demonstrate that to you in ways that reflect who you are.”





OPPOSITE PAGE: LSNA's 2020 Día de Muertos altar

ABOVE: Altar detail

Reflecting on the path that arts-infused collaborations have fostered for LSNA, Susan Yanun, its director of planning, said that these collaborations with small business owners and excluded workers helped expand the organization's focus on economic justice issues. **And in 2020, after a racial equity analysis of state and federal resources that were not flowing to area small businesses, LSNA, together with the Illinois Coalition on Immigrants and Refugees, advocated for the inclusion of \$30 million in survival funds for immigrant families.**

Marcelo Ferrer feels that these artistic collaborations not only deepened community relations with LSNA, but also strengthened LSNA's own commitments to community. As Ferrer put it, "We're here to stay as an organization as well." One aspect of this commitment is an expansion in the way that LSNA includes and promotes awareness of Black, Afro-Latino, and Indigenous cultures in its work, especially in the Here to Stay land trust, which promotes not only permanently affordable homes but also a kind of cultural autonomy for the neighborhood:

“ Look at the pro-Black, pro-Indigenous lens that has permeated all of LSNA. We talk about it as *palenque*—the new communities created when slaves escape, called maroon settlements in English and *quilombos* in Brazil— creating autonomous zones, spaces of liberation. That's starting to happen for the whole of LSNA, and it's a real shift—a mature LSNA that is taking things to the next level.

## What LSNA has provided artists and culture-bearers

Rios-Sierra, LSNA's board chair, drew a connection between the artistic and craft-making activities that occur within many Latinx homes, and events like Tamal Fest and the Carnival de Cariño. By showcasing local artists, LSNA was helping make their crafts more accessible, but also bringing this culturally grounded practice of everyday craft making into greater visibility:

“For Latinos in general, art is part of our everyday life. The things we make, we wear them, everything in our homes is art. The things we make are handmade things—that’s part of our resourcefulness: if we can’t buy it, I’ll figure out how to make it. If that’s the audience you’re speaking to, that’s an integral thing to recognize. This is who you are, we see this as who you are.”

Rios-Sierra, who left banking and came to LSNA first as a volunteer, speaks of the importance of bringing visibility to immigrants’ artistic practices as a way to change racist narratives about immigrants more broadly:

“As a Latina there’s a pressure to stand up for who we are, and to create some kind of visibility for ourselves. Art is a way for me to declare who I am, and that I exist, and what I come from is important. It wasn’t that I became this social justice artist, it’s just how that evolved. As a Latina artist, it has to say something—not just to be there, but to say something that strengthens our culture and where we come from.”

Art that “says something” and does something was the intention and experience of creating butterfly mosaics across the Welcoming Corridor. Butterflies are a symbol of migration, and one of the purposes of creating the mosaics was to signal welcome to all immigrants, in public spaces and throughout community establishments. The butterflies became potent, inclusive symbols all over schools, and along businesses on Milwaukee Avenue and Armitage. Taken together, they proclaimed, as Marcelo Ferrer said, “This space is protected by the power of community.”

The butterfly mosaics were received more powerfully because people knew they were associated with LSNA’s defense of immigrants. In other ways, the impact of creating the art and of experiencing it were both enhanced. As residents assembled the mosaic, affixing stones piece by piece, they were taking

LSNA provided local artists with greater reach and visibility.

Collaborations with LSNA resulted in more powerful art, in the way it was received by local residents as affirming their place in community, and more impactful art, which helped draw out messages about the need for wholeness in a broken immigration system.



part in a traditional Indigenous artistic practice while also saying something important about the need for wholeness in the face of a broken immigration system. As Rios-Sierra said:

“ Mosaics are one of the oldest known art forms. Indigenous peoples’ pyramids are basically mosaics, tiny rocks. Making mosaics is therapeutic, putting pieces together into an image I’m proud to show off. Especially for the butterflies, which represent immigrants. What we’re talking about is a very broken immigration system. It’s not working for a lot of us. So the butterflies are all these broken pieces that we’re putting together, into a likeness that we can live with. Essentially that’s what we’re doing when we’re organizing around immigration. We’re trying to put together a system that’s very broken and that needs to work for us. That’s what the mosaic is, it’s all of us coming together, and putting together that society and community that is supportive— it is who we are, and for us, and that we can stand to look at.

# Questions for Artists, Community Developers, and Activists to Ask Each Other

**THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT ASSESSMENT TOOLS, CHECK-LISTS, AND MEASUREMENT SCHEMA** about how to integrate the arts with community action. Some more prominent and comprehensive recent tools include an extensive set of instruments developed and collected by NeighborWorks America through its Success Measures initiative, covering survey, observational, and creative tools that assess multiple topics, from the visibility of public art to the use of outdoor gathering spaces to social cohesion.<sup>14</sup> LISC itself recently launched a comprehensive toolkit covering topics such as values, asset mapping, power dynamics, and evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

There are three dimensions that distinguish the questions below. The first is that they are meant to be short and able to be addressed by creative and activist practitioners as part of a planning process.

The second is their focus on *practice* over *community-level outcomes*. When I argued above that poetry can be difficult, but does not tend to permit mysterious thinking, I was suggesting that art's power comes from tracing *directly* the care and responsibility that people have for each other, the positive effects of care and activism on individuals and systems, and the harm that comes from misusing power. It does a disservice to the power of art to ob-

secure this immediate, direct impact by insisting that placemaking or place-keeping initiatives (even well-funded ones) could and should, in themselves, touch so many people, so deeply, that thousands of households would be transformed even in the most direct areas of impact, such as social cohesion.

The third distinguishing feature of the questions below is a focus on the *mutual* benefits of collaboration to *both* artists and community activists. To be more pointed, I am uncomfortable with the tone of some creative placemaking pieces, because there is sometimes the inadvertent suggestion that artists are, in themselves, gifts to activism and community development. Artists can enhance community practice, but they do not automatically bestow a deeper connection to community, or to residents' lived realities. As artists know, the opposite is the case— greater access to community and to reality is a gift to the artist and cultural worker. Powerful cultural activities can enhance the impact of community action, when collaborations are effectively implemented. But it is from a place of both audacity and humility that these collaborations may best form— humility and audacity being shared traits of artists and activists.

To better integrate the arts and community action, what may be needed is a more unified theory of practice among disciplines describing the qualities that effective art shares with creative community development. The measurement and planning scheme below uses three terms to describe these shared qualities:

#### REACH

This concept involves the scope of those who participate in a cultural or community project—with participation defined not just as passive audience, but as taking an active part in shaping or experiencing the art or activism.

#### POWER

This concept is meant to suggest the *depth* of participation. For artists and culture-makers, this can refer to the emotional power of participation, and how it advances a sense of agency within complex community histories. For activists and community developers, it can refer to the depth of commitments required of allies and collaborators in implementing an initiative.

#### IMPACT

This is the ultimate, equity-promoting goal of the cultural and activist endeavor, achieved by engaging community residents (reach) and through the depth of that engagement (power).

Below is a simplified set of four questions, focused not just on the value of arts to community development, but also on the value of community activism to the artist. They use this common vocabulary of *reach, power, and impact* to describe the “value-add” the two disciplines may pose to each other. The questions come in two sets. A first, “foundational” question examines in broad terms the artists' or activists' goal (or impact) and how it will be achieved by engaging (reach) and through the depth of that commitment (power). The second question asks how collaboration between artists/culture-makers and activists/community developers can expand the scope of engagement (broadening reach), deepen engagements (enhancing power), and ultimately contribute to deeper impact of the cultural or community project.

From the answers to these broad planning questions, different quantitative and qualitative measures can be formed that examine outcomes of this integration in practice. For example, LSNA informally measured the value-added “reach” the Tamal Fest contributed to its immigrant defense work by noting the increased number of attendees at its know-your-rights training.

QUESTION

# 1 What is the “base” community organizing or community development strategy, and its perceived pathway to change?

**IMPACT**

What is the target change, in terms of advancing equity?

In the LSNA example, making Hermosa a safe space for immigrants and advancing social justice.

**POWER**

To effect that change, what core group needs to be engaged, and how deeply do their commitments need to run?

LSNA's core coalition members expanded to engage new businesses and organizations in the Welcoming Corridor.

**REACH**

What relationship with the broader community (beyond the core group) do we need to effect that change?

Taking direction from community members about the defense and advocacy they need and want to participate in; making people aware of services and decreasing their isolation.

QUESTION

2 How does collaboration with artists and cultural workers enhance the reach, power, and impact of these core strategies? Specifically, how do the arts:

REACH

Broaden engagement with community stakeholders and direction from them?

In the LSNA example, the Tamal Fest greatly increased the organization's visibility in Hermosa, leading to increased awareness of immigrant rights.

POWER

Broaden and deepen core stakeholder engagement?

Tamal Fest and the Carnival de Cariño deepened the commitment of local business owners to mutual aid activities. They also allowed LSNA to expand its own commitment to those business owners and to economic justice work.

IMPACT

Through these means, increase overall?

Work in placekeeping expanded LSNA's economic justice and small business support, by laying the groundwork for successful advocacy with excluded workers and businesses.

QUESTION

# 3 What is the “base” ambition of the artist or cultural worker, and how is this ambition realized?

**IMPACT**

What is the intended cultural impact of the art?

In the LSNA examples, reaching immigrant residents deeply to affirm their culture and place in the neighborhood.

**POWER**

What experiences do core audiences need to have to enact this impact?

A deep sense of wholeness, pride and resistance to anti-immigrant stereotypes.

**REACH**

How are broader audiences reached, and to what effect?

Through creating events on the corridor and marking the place as welcoming, through performances, festivals, mosaics, and other neighborhood-based events.

QUESTION

# 4 How does collaboration with activists and community developers enhance this cultural change ambition?

**REACH**

**How does it expand the breadth of engagement with the cultural work?**

Tamal Fest deeply amplified the ordinary avenues artisans and chefs would have for their activities, by drawing on LSNA's community networks.

**POWER**

**How does it advance a deeper engagement with history and community that is complex, nuanced, and agentic?**

Tamal Fest celebrated the diversity of Latinx cultures in Hermosa, bringing together food from different regions that would not otherwise have been paired. It also occurred during a weekened when ICE raids were planned, which (combined with LSNA immigrant defense activities) helped reframe the cultural celebration into one that was also marked by resistance.

**POWER**

**How do these enhance the ultimate cultural impact of the work?**

While there were many examples of culture enhancing the affirmation of immigrants' place in Hermosa, one particular example was through the experience of the mosaics—making people feel that “this space is protected by the power of community” that was creating wholeness from brokenness.

# Endnotes

- 1 Jackson, M. R., Herranz, J., & Kabwasa-Green, F. (2003). *Art and culture in communities: a framework for measurement*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- 2 Early in the field's development, the National Endowment for the Arts launched efforts to create indicators from secondary data sources such as the American Community Survey, using the Urban Institute's Validating Arts and Livability Indicators (VALI) Study. Other examples include Stern, M.J. (2014). *Measuring the outcomes of creative placemaking*. In *The role of artists & the arts in creative placemaking*, May 30-31, 2014, Baltimore, MD—symposium report (pp. 84-97). Washington, DC: Goethe-Institut and EUNIC. That study looked at the correlations between community change in Philadelphia and the presence of cultural assets.
- 3 For example, some prominent funders emphasized early in the development of the field that the impact of creative placemaking or placekeeping was to “connect, engage, and listen,” or to allow the community to “narrate itself.”
- 4 See for example the framing of the 2019 issue of *Community Development Innovation Review*.
- 5 McCafferty, M. (2003). A fresh look at the place name Chicago. *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 96(2), 116-129.
- 6 Reed, C. (2015). The early African American settlement of Chicago, 1833-1870. *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 108(3-4), 211-265.
- 7 Popkin, S. J. (2004). *A decade of HOPE VI: Research findings and policy challenges*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- 8 Joseph, M. L., Chaskin, R. J., & Webber, H. S. (2007). The theoretical basis for addressing poverty through mixed-income development. *Urban Affairs Review*, 42(3), 369-409.
- 9 Cisneros, H. G., Engdahl, L., & Schmoke, K. L. (2009). *From despair to hope: HOPE VI and the new promise of public housing in America's cities*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- 10 Petty, A. (2013). *High rise stories: voices from Chicago public housing*. San Francisco: McSweeney's.
- 11 Note the language of the spirit in Anne Nicodemus's coining of the term creative placemaking: “In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local businesses' viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.” (Emphasis added.)
- 12 This is why, at LISC, we search for community impact using rigorous comparative statistical models, so that we understand how a community has changed over time as compared to similar places, and we assess community impact only after scaled-up, intensively resourced efforts have taken place—for example, after LISC participated in the financing and construction of approximately 10% of the housing units in the Phillips neighborhood of South Minneapolis, where over \$1 billion in public and private resources were also directed over time.
- 13 LSNA (2018). Here to stay quality of life plan. <https://www.lsna.net/qlp>.
- 14 See <https://successmeasures.org/artsandculturetools>.
- 15 See <https://www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/creative-placemaking/main/creative-placemaking-toolkit/>.

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